

SCRIPTURE READING Matthew 5:1-12, The Message: *You're Blessed*

1-2 When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions. This is what he said:

3 "You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope.
With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

4 "You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you.
Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

5 "You're blessed when you're content with just who you are – no more, no less.
That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

6 "You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God.
He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.

7 "You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,'
you find yourselves cared for.

8 "You're blessed when you get your inside world – your mind and heart – put right.
Then you can see God in the outside world.

9 "You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight.
That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.

10 "You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution.
The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.

11-12 "Not only that – count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort, and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens – give a cheer, even! – for though they don't like it, *I* do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.

SERMON *"The Communion of Saints"*

Please pray with me: Holy God, you meet us here on this day as we remember and continue to celebrate the lives of those who have passed into your eternal care. As you catch our tears of sadness and feel the pain of our losses, wrap us in the assurance that eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor human imagination envisioned what you have prepared for us all.

We lift our prayers to you: Creator, Redeemer and Comforter. Amen

I was googling the word, "saints" the other day... and the football, team, *New Orleans Saints* come up first. I tried again, typing: "saints, holy people." THE SCREEN then DISPLAYED:

"Top 10 Saints every Catholic should know." (Want to hear who they are?)

St. Michael the Archangel, St. Christopher, St. Jude, St. Anthony of Padua, St. Joseph,

St. Mary the Virgin, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Peter and St. Joan of Arc.

And, the 911 saints that have been “canonized” by Pope Francis since 2013
Mother Teresa of Calcutta is one of them.

In the United Church of Christ, we do not talk about saints very often, but, since we are observing “All Saints Day” today, (four days late) I believe that it is a good time to consider saints. But, what about saints like Rev. Martin Luther King Jr and the Dalai Lama? Aren’t they holy people? What about those among us, living today...who work in hospitals... who help out in soup kitchens; the fire fighters and those searching through the rubble in war zones? those who spend much of their retirement time at Back Bay Mission? What about your sibling, or your son or daughter who can light up a room by merely walking into it? Aren’t they People who are considerate and caring? What about you and me?

I believe the “saints of God” are not people who have gone around doing good because they thought they would be honored someday centuries in the future. They were ordinary people like you and me...who we sometimes work “everyday miracles” without having it posted on Facebook or investigated to be sure it really happened ?

When Jesus spoke words something like the ones we heard in the Gospel interpretation today, do you think that he was giving instructions on how his followers should live? I do! In each beatitude, there is a discovery. In each one there is an invitation to way to follow a pathway. In these words of Jesus, we have are invited to join in communion not only with one another, as we struggle together in the midst of a broken world and as we go through the transitions that we are managing in the church. We also commune with the saints who have gone before us and who have received their eternal rest.

Presbyterian minister, Rev Tim Beach-Verhay wrote: “The saints provide a glimpse of God’s *already* in the midst of our *not-yet*.”

Be humble. Be meek. Be peacemakers. Model mourning. Care. Cooperate. Love your neighbor no matter who they are, no matter where they have come from or no matter what baggage they are carrying around.

If Robin Williams were giving the sermon on the mount, he would say only this:
"Everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about. Be kind. Always."

On this blessed day of remembrance, as we whet our curiosity about who the saints were before their names were technically considered saints, **and as we draw inspiration** from the stories of holy people around us and around the world who spread joy, who lend listening ears, who comfort the grieving and give food and shelter to the homeless... we find that like the Beatitudes, the lives of the saints who have lived in the past and the ones around us today... show the works and ways of a God who is full of surprises...and who is surprisingly able to nudge us to do the same.

Some of us are cancer survivors, some of us have survived terrible auto accidents and falls off the roof, some of us live with mental unwellness and physical difficulties which limit our access to the places and activities that we love. Some of us have survived floods and tornadoes and near-death experiences. And the list goes on.

We all have been given the gift of time. At one time or another it dawns on us that death will come. When Jesus walked on this earth, eternity was on his mind, too. With every parable, every act of mercy, every gift of healing he offered; with every time he welcomed those that the society of the first century cast out; every time he challenged injustice or so much as asked for a glass of water from someone who others shunned...he was showing us and telling us how to live out our God-created identity. He was modeling generosity and showing us the way of offering grace to others; he was telling us the truth about how God loves us, and shedding light on our sometimes foolish notion that our manner of living is good enough.

Each time a loved one has passed into eternal life, I am comforted by words of scripture such as the Beatitudes. Blessed are the days we have spent with them. Blessed is the joy that memories bring. Blessed are the words of Jesus that assure us that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses; Blessed are we, the faithful on earth, who are bound together in spirit with the saints in heaven through Jesus Christ.

We can, undoubtedly name people that we would call *Saints* who have walked the streets of our hometowns. I can think of people in this very room that *I would call "saints"* ...can you?

Two little boys, ages 8 and 10, were not exactly what anyone would call "saints." They were somehow always getting into trouble at school. The teacher had their parents' phone number on speed-dial. One day, when the boys' mother felt overwhelmed, she went to talk with her pastor and asked him if he would speak with her boys.

The pastor agreed, but he asked to see them individually. So, the mother made an appointment for the 8-year-old after school the next day, and one for the 10-year-old later that week.

The preacher, a huge man with a booming voice, sat the younger boy down and asked him sternly, "Do you know where God is, son?" The boy's mouth dropped open, but he made no response, sitting there wide-eyed with his mouth hanging open.

The pastor repeated the question in an even sterner tone, "Where is God?!"

Again, the boy made no attempt to answer. The preacher raised his voice even more and shook his finger in the boy's face and bellowed, "Where is God?!"

The boy screamed & bolted from the room, ran directly home & dove into his closet, slamming the door behind him.

When his older brother found him in the closet, he asked, "what happened?" The younger brother, gasping for breath, replied, "We are in BIG trouble this time.

"God is missing, and they think we did it!"

Now, let me ask you this: How would you describe a saint in just a few words?

Someone who lives as though God is NOT missing. Blessed be the saints, like us! So be it.

May all who come behind us faithful. May the footprints that we leave...lead them to believe and the lives we live inspire them...as they look back on **us** and *remember us all as the saints*.

This hours' worship has come to an end, let our service continue!